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★ JUN 1 - 1932 ★

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

A radio talk by J. B. Kincer, Weather Bureau, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, May 4, 1932.

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The season of the year has arrived when the weather plays an important, yea dominating, role in the greatest and most outstanding of all American industries -- agriculture. April, or the mid-spring month, brings a decided revival of farm activities and its weather is highly important in the matter of seeding, germination, and getting crops off to a good start. Normally the warming up in this month is most marked in the Central-Northern States where the average April temperature is some 20° higher than that for March. Along the Gulf coast the rise in temperature is about 6°; thus, the farther north we go the faster is the warming up in spring.

In the Eastern States, after April, killing frost does not usually occur south of New York City and southeastern Pennsylvania, except in the mountains where the average last date of occurrence is retarded one day for each 100 feet in elevation. Thus, if your locality is 1,000 feet higher than some other, you may expect frost in spring about ten days later and in fall ten days earlier, reducing the length of your growing season about twenty days. Farther west killing frost does not occur after April south of the central counties of Ohio and Indiana, northern Illinois, east-central Iowa, and central-eastern Nebraska as a rule. In this zone crops that are above the ground on the first day of May will have more than an even chance of escaping frost damage.

April temperatures, this year, played quite a game of seesaw, with cool and warm periods following one another with considerable regularity -- more so than usual. Unlike March, however, the cold spells were not severe enough to cause widespread damage, but at the same time the alternations in temperature were not conducive to good growth of spring crops and favorable germination of seed. Consequently, the beginning of May finds vegetation and field work somewhat backward in most of the principal agricultural sections of the country, but at the same time the seeding of small grains is now largely completed, and the moisture situation has been rather favorable for germination of these hardier plants.

As regards winter wheat, most of the month was unfavorable over considerable areas in some heavy producing western sections of the belt, because of persistent lack of moisture. This condition was more pronounced in western Kansas and districts adjoining on the north, west, and south. Generous rains near the close of the month brought some relief, but in many places wheat was beyond material help, and the rains came too late to be of marked benefit. The eastern Winter Wheat Belt and the Pacific Northwest had a mostly favorable April, while the spring wheat area was unusually fortunate, especially the Dakotas and eastern Montana, where most localities had much more than the normal April rainfall.

Except in the South and Southwest, corn planting in April was tardy.

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Some has been planted as far north as the central portions of Indiana and Illinois and a little locally in Iowa and northeastern Kansas; but, in general, less than the usual amount of April seeding was accomplished, with most farmers awaiting warmer weather.

The planting of cotton made fairly steady and satisfactory advance, and had begun at the end of April well to the northern parts of the Cotton Belt. Germination and growth of early-planted cotton has been slower than usual because of the cool nights that have prevailed rather generally over the cotton-growing States.

During the recent cool spell frosts were more prevalent than usual for the season of the year, with local harm to tender vegetation rather widespread as far south as the Ohio and lower Missouri Valleys. Damage was not serious from the general standpoint of crop production, except in some southwestern sections, principally eastern Colorado and New Mexico where extensive and heavy killing of fruit and truck crops occurred.

The livestock situation in the western and northwestern grazing sections continued to improve steadily, most pronouncedly from the northern Great Plains westward to the Pacific where mostly ample grazing is now afforded. Cold, rainy weather was unfavorable, however, in central Rocky Mountain sections and the Great Basin, especially for the shearing of sheep and for young lambs.

In conclusion, we may briefly summarize the April weather, for the month as a whole, as nearly normal in warmth rather generally, and considerably drier than usual in most sections. The relatively warmest weather occurred from Arkansas and northern Texas northward over the Great Plains, while the most favorable rains for the month were received in the Northwestern States, nearly all of which now have top soil moisture sufficient for present needs. Recent rains have been very helpful also in Gulf sections and the Atlantic coast area.